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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a qualitative study of seven alternative democratic program (ADP) students of a public high school in a suburb of a major city. The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how students in ADP reflect upon their transitions to become active members of the ADP community over time. The students were primarily seniors who joined ADP in their sophomore years. The ADP program was established in the site school in 1970. Observations and interviews were used to gather data. Two major themes to emerge were: the positive aspects of the program that influence student motivation and performance; and the students' perceptions of themselves and the program over time. The study found that students benefited tremendously from the small, personalized community of ADP that helped them to develop trusting relationships with their teachers and fellow students and have a voice in their own education. (Contains 24 references.) (EH)

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Students' Participation in a Democratic Community: A Study of a High School Democracy

By

Naoshi Kira

Paper presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of
the American Educational Research Association
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Students' Participation in a Democratic Community: A Study of a High School Democracy

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I. Introduction

Scholars and social critics have increasingly observed a decline in people's social and political participation in the U.S., despite its democratic form of government (Bellah, et al., 1985; Putnam, 1993). Some have argued that this decline is related to the bureaucratic, hierarchical nature of the majority of public schools, and that schools should not be *about* democracy, but should themselves *be* democracy (Dewey, 1916; Mosher, et al., 1994; Meier, 1995). Some scholars have concluded that, when students are treated as active agents of change in "school as a small society" rather than passive objects in "school as a bureaucracy" (Bidwell, 1965), they will develop a sense of social efficacy to be carried on in their life (Hepburn, 1982; Lindsay, 1984; Mosher, et al., 1994). In short, "democratic citizens are not born; they are made" (Sigel, 1991, p.3).

Often inspired by Dewey's (1916) notion of democracy and education that "the school [should become] itself a form of social life, a miniature community" (p.360), advocates of democratic education have established alternative democratic schools where students can practice democracy. Democratic schools typically have democratic forms of school governance, classroom management, and human relations among participants to give students an opportunity to become active and responsible agents who shape their own education (Mosher, et al., 1994).

The research site for this study was such an alternative democratic program (ADP) in a public high school located in a suburb of a major city. Started in 1970,

ADP has aimed to give students "a larger voice in their own education [through their participation in weekly Town Meetings[1] and membership in committees[2]] and a more personal, equal relationship with teachers...than is generally possible in the main high school" (Program Description, p.1). ADP has about 115 students annually (Grades 10-12) who are selected from applicants of the main high school that has about 1,600 students (Grades 9-12). A little over thirty percent of students are minority students or students who were born outside the U.S.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how students in ADP reflect upon their transitions to become active members of the ADP community over time. To this end, I conducted a qualitative study of ADP students, focusing on seven students who were actively involved in various activities of the program at the time of this study, but who initially were not actively involved, as described in detail below. There are very few qualitative studies of democratic schools based on students' perspectives.

There are three structural features that may affect students' experiences in ADP. First, admission to ADP is not automatic; students in the main high school must apply to ADP and follow certain procedures before their names are put in a lottery with the winners being admitted to ADP. Second, ADP is a democratic program founded as an alternative to the large traditional high school to which it belongs, and is a small program that is not self-sufficient in course offerings. Therefore, students take courses in the main high school not only during their freshman year before joining ADP, but also while they are enrolled in it. Third, about two-thirds of students spend three years in ADP after joining it in their

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1 The Town Meeting is a weekly mandatory meeting for 115 students in SWS and "serves as the major forum for shared decision-making in the areas of educational administration and educational policy" (The Program Brief, p.1).

2 There are several committees that deal with various community affairs, each consisting of about eight students and one teacher. Students' members come from volunteers and those selected out of the hat.

sophomore year, whereas the rest join ADP in their junior year or senior year, and spend two years or only one year. In this study, I focused mostly on seniors who joined ADP in their sophomore year.

II. Theoretical Frameworks: Democratic Education and School Democracy

Democratic education is the umbrella term to describe the topic of this study. The term, however, is often conceptualized in three different ways. The first way is to look at democratic education as universalization of basic educational opportunities for everyone regardless of his or her background in race, gender, and class (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1996). The second way is to consider it as an issue of governance at the federal, state, and local levels, and decentralized systems are often considered to be more democratic than centralized ones because the former are considered to be more responsive to the needs of a diverse population at the local level than the latter (e.g., Plank and Boyd, 1994).

The third way is to look at it as a process unique to each individual school in how it designs and operates daily practices, and in this study, I use the term in this sense. Dewey (1916) is one of the most influential educational philosophers who criticized the traditional form of operating schools and the passive way of learning in schools. Dewey instead stressed the importance of "the school [to become] itself a form of social life, a miniature community" (ibid., p.360), in addition to the widespread argument that democracy requires educated citizens "who elect and...obey their governors" (ibid., p.87). During the past few decades, educators, scholars, and social critics have again pointed out the limitations of traditional citizenship education to produce responsible citizens,[3] and advocated participatory forms of schooling for citizenship in a democratic society (Barber, 1984; Kohlberg, 1985; Smith, 1995; Gutmann, 1987; Parker, 1996; Soder, 1996).

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3 Traditional citizenship education refers to courses in civics or government.

Nevertheless, in terms of educational practices at the school and classroom levels, many schools do not embrace a democratic approach to the organization of school practices. Mosher, et al. (1994) put this issue succinctly when they say: "Students have been taught about democracy, but they have not been permitted to practice democracy. Most American schools remain benevolent dictatorships" (pp.1-2). This study focuses on this third issue—democratic schooling especially in high schools, using Mosher's concept of "school democracy" (ibid., p.67), that characterizes the ADP in this study.

Mosher et al. outline the essential elements of schools and programs established based on democratic principles, when they argue,

> [A]ny serious efforts to educate for democracy will have to begin by systematically organizing classroom management, school governance, and the relations among administrators, teachers, and students based on democratic principles (ibid., p.2).

Democratic schools thus tend to share such three interrelated characteristics and practices. First, the democratic schools value *democratic classroom management*: Every student is an equally important participant whose views are to be respected. Secondly, they tend to seek a *democratic school governance*: "all of those directly involved in the school, including young people, have the right to participate in the process of decision making" (Apple and Beane, 1995, p.9). Finally, they often strive to establish *democratic relations* among administrators, teachers, and students that are equal and based on mutual respect and trust.

The major arguments put forth in support of such democratic practices in schools and classrooms can be summarized as follows:

> [The] rationale for systemic democratic experiences in school is founded on four principles: (1) democracy is vitally dependent on a responsive, educated citizenry; (2) children educated in democratic groups benefit personally as well as in terms of social development; (3) democratic participation contributes to the growth of minds; and (4) democracy has to

> be recreated in the understanding and behavior of each new generation of citizens or it is jeopardized (Mosher, et al., p.24).

In other words, "democracy is neither a possession nor a guaranteed achievement. It is forever in the making; it might be thought of as...moral and imaginative possibility" (Greene, 1985, p.3). In the process, participatory education becomes crucial if the U.S. is to realize democracy that is fair and just. As Dewey said, "education, therefore, is a process of living" (Dewey, 1897, p.430), and the school becomes a microcosm of a community in a participatory democracy.

Although "the notion of establishing governance structures based on democratic principles in schools strikes fear in the hearts of many" (Mosher, et al., p.2), there have been in fact a number of attempts in the U.S. to establish schools based on such democratic principles. Attempting to implement a democratic program is a formidable task, and many schools or programs once started fail to garner the support to assure long term viability. Nevertheless, the schools reported, for example, by Mosher, et al. (1994) and Apple and Beane (1995) have succeeded in establishing the essential elements of democratic schools and have produced above-mentioned results in varying degrees. Initiatives to establish a democratic school or program within a large school often emerge from either teachers or community members making the initiatives. The democratic program in which I conducted my study is one successful example, as it has been in operation for over twenty-five years.

A few studies have been conducted and published on existing democratic schools, but they were mostly written from the perspectives of adults who founded or helped others found them—teachers, administrators, or educators—and not much from those of students. Therefore, my study placed the primary emphasis on students' reflections of their participation in ADP over time.

III. Methods

I conducted a qualitative study of ADP students, focusing on students who were actively involved in various activities of the program at the time of the study (e.g., volunteering to be on committees, speaking up frequently in Town Meetings), but who initially were not very involved. Specifically, my research question was: How do students in an alternative democratic program perceive their transitions to become active participants of the community over time? My study dealt with democratic educational practices at the school and classroom levels, emphasizing students' reflections upon their participation in ADP.

As for the site, I selected the ADP because it is a well-established program founded in 1970, and the staff of ADP granted me access to conduct my research study. Out of the 115 students (Grades 10-12) who were enrolled in ADP, I decided to focus on seven students (six seniors and one junior) who were actively involved in the activities of ADP at the time of the study. Angela, a veteran English teacher, helped me identify those students with her intimate knowledge of students in ADP. In order to answer the research question, I used the "extreme...case [samples]" so that "lessons may be learned about...extreme [successful] outcomes that are relevant to improving more typical programs" (Patton, 1990, p.170).

The three male seniors (Dan, John, and Andy)[4] and three female seniors (Amy, Rachel, and Nancy) were selected partly because they had volunteered to be on the Review Committee[5] and/or other committees, and hence were considered by Angela to be quite active participants of the community, and partly because they went through some transitions over time according to Angela's knowledge of these students. One female junior (Kathy) was chosen for similar reasons,

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4 All the names of students and staff members used in this study are pseudonyms.

5 "The eight [student] members of The Review Committee [with a teacher] are responsible for the academic progress and well-being of students. The Committee meets with students referred by either staff or other students to discuss academic, social, and attendance problems" on a weekly basis (The Program Brief).

although she had not been on the Review Committee. I did not select sophomores because they had not been in the program long enough.

I collected my data for the study through observations and interviews to answer my research question. I conducted *observations* of English classes, Town Meetings, and committee meetings, in order to obtain a holistic view of general features of activities and social norms in ADP. Through these observations, I generated questions used in interviews with the seven students. I tried to follow the seven students across the different settings to the extent that I could so that I can find out some variations in their behaviors.

I conducted a fifty-minute interview with each of the seven students in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the transitions that they went through to become active participants of the community. I also interviewed Angela, the English teacher and Evelyn, the Coordinator, focusing on major characteristics of ADP and major features of students, in order for me to enhance my understanding of ADP. I developed most of the questions based on my observations prior to interviews. I tape-recorded and transcribed all the interviews for data analyses.

I used the "cross-case analysis" (Patton, 1990, p.376) of the data to find some common themes and different points across the interview transcripts, while also using an "inductive analysis" (ibid., p.390) in that the major concepts used in the analysis came from interviewees' words.[6] In addition, I also relied heavily on the distinction that the participants often made between "the community" of ADP and "the downstairs school"—or the main high school, as presented below. I developed codes based on the two overarching indigenous concepts—"privilege" and "the community" for the purposes of data reduction and analysis because the two concepts helped me make sense of the experiences reported by the students.

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6 Such words that emerged include "privilege," "the community," "participation," "respect," and "trust."

IV. Findings

In this report, I present my findings, using two important indigenous concepts—"privilege" and "the community"—for data reduction and analysis, and hence I will summarize my findings based on these terms, along with another concept that bridges the two concepts—"trust relationships." By using these three concepts, I will cover two major themes that emerged in my study: (1) *positive aspects* of the program that influence student motivation and performance; and (2) students' *perceptions* of themselves and the program over time. I mostly rely on the transcripts of my interviews with the seven students, supplemented by transcripts of other interviews, along with observation field notes.

A. Privilege — The Students' Sense of Their Privileged Status

In my interviews with the seven students, they all made a similar point that their enrollment in the democratic program was a "*privilege*." Dan feels that students at ADP are very special in having "incredible teachers" and an "incredible guidance counselor" who really care about students—the feeling shared by all the seven students. Dan also stressed the importance of having "Town Meetings" and being put "in a situation where [students] make rules." John also stressed the importance of having teachers who create a classroom atmosphere that respects student "spontaneity," initiatives, and perspectives, rather than "pushing their curriculum." Kathy also thinks that she is "very lucky to be in ADP" because she "[feels] that there is such a connection between everyone in [ADP], and you get to know people very well."

It is important to note here that all seven students feel that they have a privilege when they *contrast* their experiences at *ADP* for over the past year or two with those at the *main high school* in their freshman year and courses that they currently take. In fact, the word, "downstairs," is widely used not only by students

but also by staff members to refer to the main high school located below ADP that occupies the top floor in one of the main school buildings. It follows that the expression, "downstairs students," refers to students at the main school. For all seven students, "downstairs" represented something "formal" and somewhat negative, while ADP, "the community," or "up here" represented something informal, spontaneous, and positive reflecting their privileged status.

For example, John contrasted the two by saying:

> I like the atmosphere; it really works for my needs. Downstairs is much more formal...But up here (in ADP), it seems like they care about not only how you are doing academically, but also how you are actually feeling inside, and take to your needs and grab you when you are falling.

Related to the privileged status of students in ADP, Angela, the English teacher, gave me a teacher's side of the story:

> We have a *tighter safety net* to use everyone's favorite image. People don't fall so far before we catch them.....So because we know students better, we are able, I think, to ask more of them and support them more.....I think we are able to step in quicker to prevent them from failing. And therefore, they can have more success. [They] can use more success, and [they] can end up feeling better about [themselves].

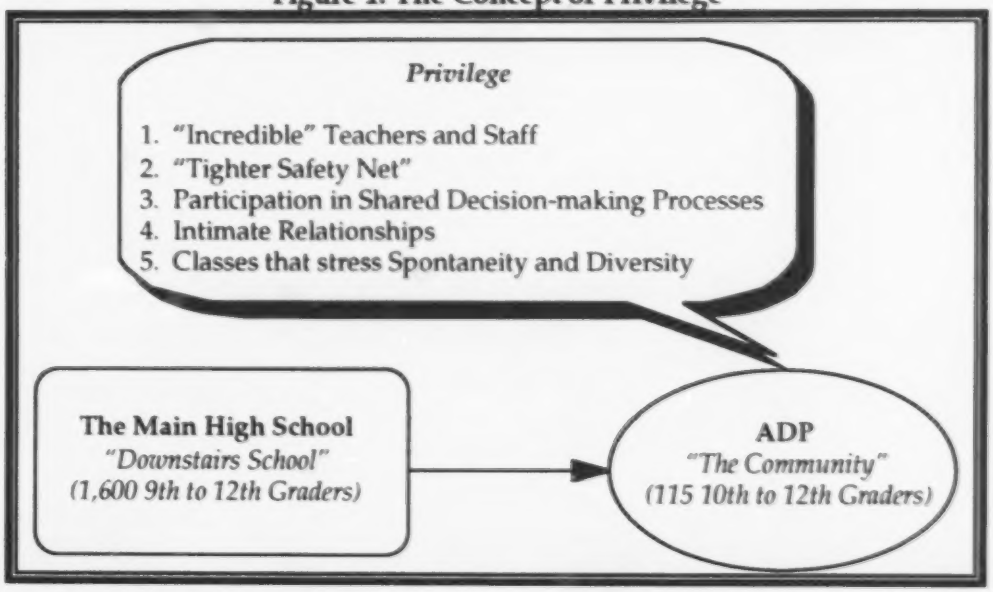
Thus, the availability of a tighter safety net is an important aspect of students' privilege. Indeed, John told me that when he was not motivated in his sophomore year:

> Teachers gave me lots of help and made me feel that I can actually have a faith in myself in that when I put all my potential and work to my full potential, I can accomplish a great deal, they helped me out in believing myself.

In summary, all seven students feel that their enrollment in ADP is a privilege when they contrast their experiences in ADP with those at the main high school located downstairs. They seem to contrast the differences because they have

experienced conspicuous differences between ADP and the main high school over time in favor of ADP. Being in a small community of 115 students from 10th to 12th graders, they all feel that they have a privilege in that they have: (1) access to "incredible teachers and guidance counselor"; (2) a "tighter safety net;" (3) the opportunities to give their voice and participate in shared decision-making processes through Town Meetings and student committees; (4) intimate relationships with teachers, as well as among students; and (5) classes that emphasize students' spontaneity and diverse views rather than being focused on materials, as graphically presented in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: The Concept of Privilege



B. Community – How to Become a Member of the Community

"*The community*" was another important indigenous concept, used frequently by both students and teachers. When ADP teachers or students talk about "the community," they almost always refer to the community of ADP, without including the high school as a whole. For example, one teacher said at a Town Meeting that I observed, regarding the lounge that ADP has, but the main school

does not: "It is your lounge. The policy is that people from downstairs are not allowed unless they are with someone from *the community*." By community, he refers to the ADP students in this case. Thus, the community, as often used in ADP, is an exclusive one to distinguish itself from the rest of the high school.

It is important to point out at this point, however, that, even though the seven students currently feel that their participation in the democratic program is a privilege, their mere enrollment in ADP did not automatically allow them to become part of the community, especially in their sophomore year when they first came in. The seven students told me they were either "intimidated" or "scared" at the beginning, when they described their initial reactions to ADP as follows.

> Dan: I hated ADP. I was very *intimated* and very scared to talk to other people. I didn't talk at all. I didn't do my work as much. I was scared because it seemed like when I got up there, there was already a community. Everybody already knew everybody except for me; that's how I felt.
>
> John: Sophomore year, I just came in, and I didn't really know what it was about. I was kind of *intimidated* by seniors, and I just didn't know what was going on. It was kind of confusing at first, but I guess I didn't want to pay much attention.
>
> Amy: When I first came into ADP, I felt a little *scared* because I was new to the community, and it was hard for me at first to become adjusted to it...I wasn't really able to speak as much in class as I wanted to because I was a little afraid—it wasn't very comfortable.

Thus, they all first felt intimidated and scared. It was in fact only later that they started appreciating what ADP was there to offer, and hence they were able to express their sense of privilege about being in ADP in their later years. It is interesting to note that John, for example, said to me, "I took...for granted [the privilege that I had in the program in my sophomore year]." Similarly, Amy stated: "I guess when I came in I didn't really appreciate how much liberty I had to control my own education."

In terms of students' transitions to become more active members, for Dan, the major transformation took place when he realized that he needed to make an effort, as he described:

> Then, I realized I had to do something...I had to make an effort to show that I was involved, and that I did care about the community. Once I started doing that, once I started opening myself up, people opened themselves up to me...The community will not come to you...You have to make an effort to come in. Do your work, participate in class, and make an effort to get to know people.

In retrospect, Dan told me that it was at "the Overnight"—an annual overnight retreat for community building activities—that he gradually started making an effort to get to know people. Similarly, Andy made a relatively quick transition after he felt "a little scared" at the beginning: "Eventually I did get to know [people in ADP]; I talked to them. And I actually became part of the community, and that was good. An initial period only lasted a month or two."

For John, the transition was not so dramatic as Dan's case, but a gradual transition took place, as he described:

> [A]t that time I was not motivated and felt that I didn't find the purpose to do school work or working hard. I was slacking off, but during that whole period of time, my teachers were always on my case...They really helped me along, but I was just not motivated—I guess I was too selfish to participate... After my first year in ADP, I just finally got the mood of every class. I got to see how things flowed in and how it felt, and I got myself participating.

For Kathy, a big transition took place during the summer between her sophomore year and junior year, as she described:

> [T]his summer, I went to this acting program...And it was for six weeks and we lived there. I had a lot of responsibility there; I was the dance captain for the musical...and I had so many accomplishments this summer. And it made me feel good to be on top of everything, and realizing that things can go so much easier for you if you are...doing everything ahead of time, that carried into my school year this year. I made a vow to myself that I was going to do better in school this year, and I could carry that enthusiasm that I had for

> acting which I love into my school work so that I feel better about myself and what I was doing.

It is important to mention here that there was no Overnight in her sophomore year, and she said to me: "Not just me, but a lot of people who've just come in felt lost from that because we didn't get to know our peers as well as the previous year had because they had Overnight." Thus, for Kathy, it was an event outside of ADP that helped her get motivated to participate.

When I asked Dan how he would recommend new students of ADP how to become a member of the community, he described:

> If you want to be in ADP, if you want to be in a democratic community, you have to be willing to give to the community, and that's participation and respect. And, it's going to be hard at the beginning because you don't know a lot of people. But, once you realize that if you respect them and participate with them, they will participate with you and respect you. That's basically it really.

According to Dan, "*participation*" and "*respect*" are necessary if students want to be in the democratic community at ADP. In short, when they participate in the activities of ADP, they can be accepted and respected by the community. Interestingly, Dan also told me that skipping classes and not attending Town Meetings are considered at ADP as "*disrespect*" to their teachers and fellow students. Dan powerfully stated that "the norm in ADP is to be *respectful* to other people." Therefore, their participation in classes and Town Meetings were expressions of their respect to their fellow students and teachers.

When I asked John about some reasons why he decided to volunteer to be on the Review Committee, he told me:

> I think it will be a good experience for me. I think I have a lot of ideas and things I can give to the people who show up on the Review Committee because I have been in the similar position. I've had to see all the teachers in a meeting. I guess with my experience I wish that I could help, with my

> experience, just to help others. I want to give something finally into the community or to other students...

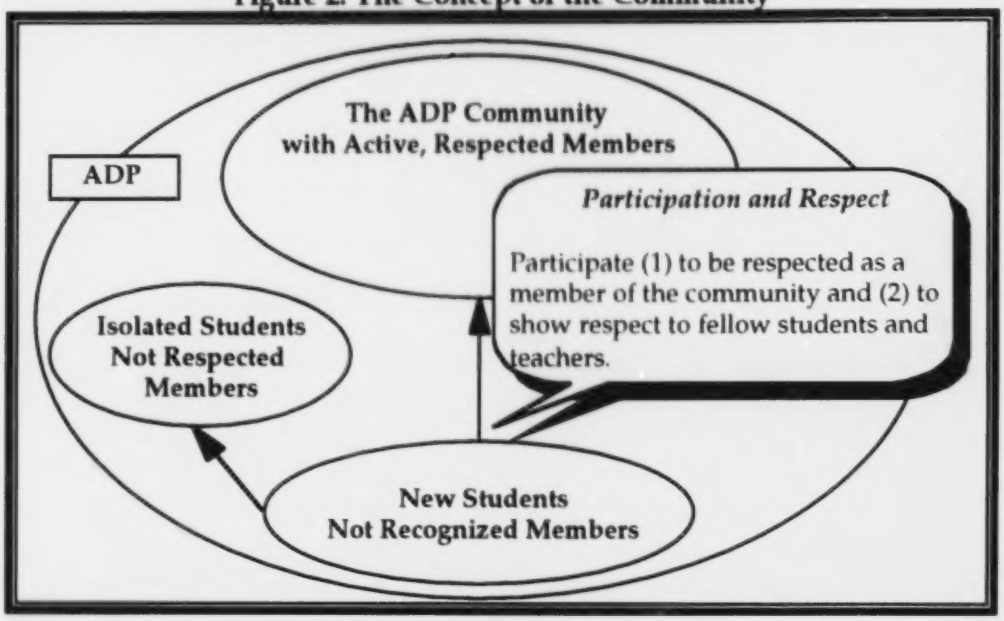
In other words, appreciating the help that he received from his teachers and fellow students in his sophomore year, John wanted to reciprocate to the community by making the use of his own experience as someone who was often referred to the Review Committee himself because he had attendance and academic problems. Like Dan, John thus also stresses the importance of giving something to the community.

Similarly, Kathy started a book group with her friends because they wanted to read more outside of school. She said to me, "for me it was sort of my way of contributing to the community and my way of really getting involved in the community." Like John, Kathy also had some academic problems in her sophomore year and hence was referred to the Review Committee, but she managed to get her act together with the help of teachers and students, triggered by the summer camp as mentioned above. In return, she feels the urge to give something back to the community. In trying to contribute to the community, she is aware of the dynamics of the community that "you get so much back from ADP if you give a lot into it."

Thus, although teachers and students often describe the ADP community as distinct from the main high school, for the seven students, their mere enrollment in ADP did not automatically allow them to be legitimate members in the community. As new comers, they were all intimidated by seniors and pre-existing community. Triggered by the Overnight or other events, however, they gradually started making an effort to get to know people and get involved. They realized that they needed to participate in order to be respected by the community, as well as to show their respect to their fellow students and teachers. It was only then that they felt comfortable participating in activities and hence to become active

members of the community, as presented graphically in **Figure 2**. It should be added that there are also "isolated students" in **Figure 2** who are not respected members because they do not participate very much in class and school activities. I will discuss this issue in more detail in the Implications section below.

Figure 2: The Concept of the Community


The ADP Community
with Active, Respected Members
ADP
Participation and Respect
Participate (1) to be respected as a member of the community and (2) to show respect to fellow students and teachers.
Isolated Students
Not Respected
Members
New Students
Not Recognized Members

C. Trust Relationships

What struck me through my interviews with the seven students was that they all stressed the importance of the intimate relationships they had with teachers and among students in giving them self-esteem and confidence in themselves, which led to their higher motivation to participate in activities in ADP. Kathy stressed this point most; she told me that classes in ADP are very cooperative, while classes downstairs are very competitive. Here I present two quotations from my interview with her:

> [I]n ADP classes, the teacher and the students really work to get everyone to know each other and to get everyone feeling like a part of the class, feeling

like an equal. In downstairs classes, you don't work as much knowing each other; it's just focused on the material and it's not focused on cooperation.

I feel that there is such a connection between everyone in ADP, and you get to know people very well. I have a real relationship with each of my teachers at ADP, which really helps me and makes me want to work hard and makes me very motivated to show them everything that I can do and prove myself and work up to my potential. I wouldn't be really doing that if I didn't feel such a connection to them and such a connection to everyone in my class. You can *trust* everyone in your class.

For Kathy, trust relationships in classes are very important in allowing her not only to feel comfortable to participate in classes but also to be motivated to work hard and do well. She enjoys ADP classes because the teachers create a cooperative environment in which trust relationships become an important basis of her motivation to study hard. She went on to state: "Everyone wants everyone to get and to understand; you are not just in it for yourself, but you are in it for everyone." Amy, Rachel, and Nancy made similar points, although they did not emphasize them as much as Kathy did.

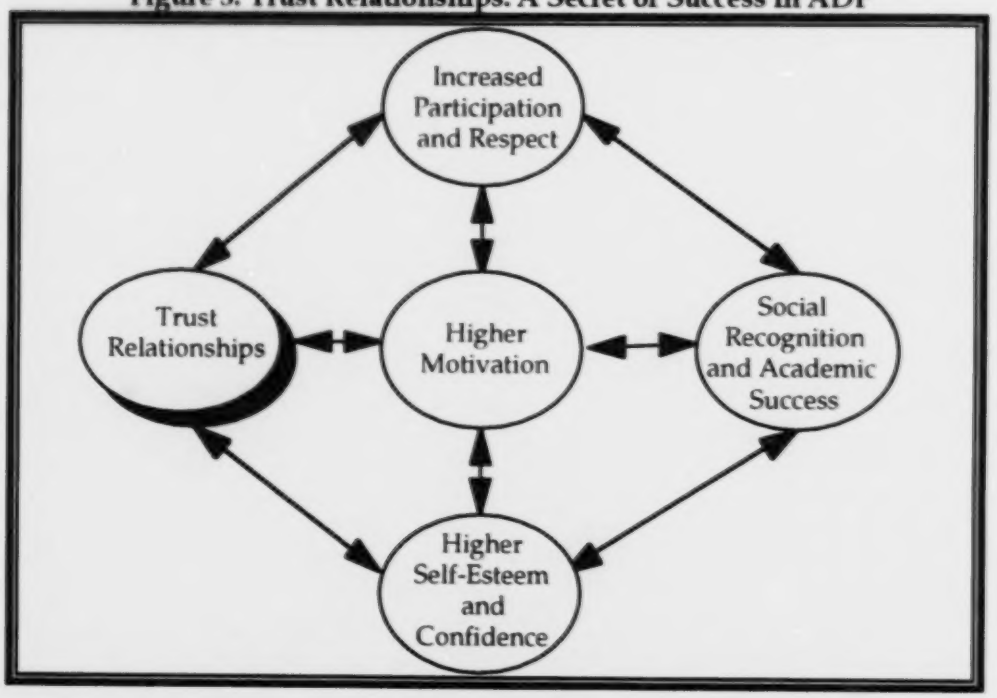
Similarly, John and Dan made the following points when they said:

John: The main difference is just teacher-student relationship. Even like classrooms up here work like clock-work. Conversation just goes here and there, and you get lots of ideas, instead of teachers just...giving their own ideas. Down there we are more seen as objects. They just like give us information to memorize. This is what you have to learn. Up here, teachers teach us to kind of teach the class. Teachers just give us an idea, and we bounce back and forth with it, and she overall sums up what we've said and brings new questions, then we go on from that. So, it's like teachers not only keep us in line but are eager to push us ahead instead of pushing their curriculum.

Dan: It's very democratic, people sit in a circle, they listen to what you want to say, and then they talk about it. That's great. It's nice and relaxed, and you are not pressured. It's very comforting to be able to say here is what I wrote, and what do you have to say about it? No one is rude, and people are supportive, and they give you good comments. They respect you, and there is so much respect in each class. That's something that is great.

Thus, all seven emphasized the importance of having trust relationships with their teachers and among students in the community. Once they developed trust relationships, they all felt comfortable and motivated to participate in class and school activities, supported by a cooperative and supportive nature of classrooms and the community. As a result, they all told me that they became more active in the community and were doing better academically this year than in the past. The relationships among various important factors are presented in a simplified fashion in **Figure 3** in order only to clarify some possible interrelations. Trust relationships seem to lead to increased participation, higher motivation, and higher self-esteem and confidence, which in turn may lead to social recognition and academic success. Some arrows go to both directions indicating that the factors in question reinforce each other: they represent a *virtuous circle* in which, for example, higher motivation leads to social recognition and academic success, in turn leading to even higher motivation to some extent.

Figure 3: Trust Relationships: A Secret of Success in ADP



D. Summary and Discussions

In summary, to be at ADP is a *privilege* because ADP has provided the seven students with much more personalized attention and many more opportunities to shape their own educational experiences than in the main high school. But, at the same time, their mere enrollment was not enough for them to become respected members of *the community*; they were initially intimidated by seniors and the pre-existing community without having their part in it. It was only after they started participating in the activities of ADP that they started to be recognized and respected and hence became part of the community. Community-building activities, such as the Overnight, and other events seem to have triggered them to start making their effort to get to know people and get involved. In other words, once they built *trust relationships* with their teachers and fellow students over time, they became comfortable participating in class and school activities, leading to their social recognition and academic success, in contrast to their passive status in the community in the past coupled with academic problems. In fact, all seven students were doing better academically than in their sophomore year.

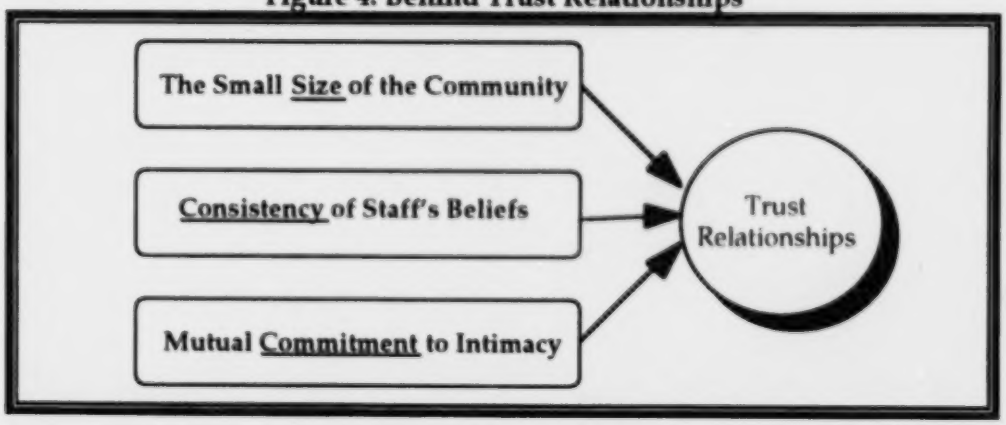
Based on these findings, people may ask whether or not any student in a non-democratic program can have the kind of experience that the seven students have had in ADP. If there are a few engaging teachers who develop trust relationships with their students in a traditional school, can they not create a supportive environment in which students can develop socially and academically? I think they can, but one major problem is that they often constitute an exception rather than the rule in creating such an environment in the context of the often hierarchical and impersonal nature of a traditional high school, that Sizer (1983) excellently described in his well-known work, Horace's Compromise. In addition, the large size of typical high schools prevents teachers from creating such a personalized environment.

By contrast, the democratic program in ADP was established with a systematic effort to create a small, supportive environment in which students are given more freedom and responsibility in directing their own education. In fact, all staff members share common beliefs that educational practices should be based on democratic principles for the youth in their program, and it is this *consistency* that is of critical importance. In ADP, therefore, trust relationships can be developed more easily as stressed by the students interviewed.

Moreover, Angela emphasized the importance of "*mutual commitment to intimacy*" as making a difference. Most student interviewees would have spent three years in the program, and the staff members make a significant long-term commitment to each student, as reflected in the metaphor of a tight safety net that Angela used. It is indeed a cohesive community to which students belong, and the staff would consistently and patiently encourage students with problems to get into the community. John is a perfect example of such students who made the transition, with the encouragement of his teachers and his fellow students in the community, as presented above.

I presented the three major factors that have led the students to develop trust relationships in **Figure 4**, consisting of: (1) the small size of the community; (2) consistency of staff's belief; and (3) mutual commitment to intimacy.

Figure 4: Behind Trust Relationships



V. Significance and Implications

This qualitative study was intended to contribute to the in-depth understanding of the processes by which the seven students became active participants of the program, that led to their higher social recognition and better academic performance than in their sophomore year. The significance of this study thus lies in its finding that the students interviewed benefited tremendously from the small, personalized community of ADP that helped them to develop trust relationships with their teachers and fellow students and to have a voice in their own education.

The significance of this study also lies in the fact that its findings confirm one of the major arguments cited above for promoting democratic schools—"children educated in democratic groups benefit personally as well as in terms of social development" (Mosher, et al., 1994, p.24). As presented above, the seven students told me that they have indeed tremendously benefited personally from various aspects of the program and reciprocated to the community in their own ways. In short, they more or less developed "voluntary disposition and interest" to use Dewey's words (Dewey, 1916, p.87).

In terms of positive aspects of the program, one implication arises from my finding that for the seven students, once they built trust relationships with their teachers and among students over time, they became comfortable participating in class and school activities, leading to their social recognition and academic success. It suggests that trust relationships are an important basis for raising student motivation to participate in class and school activities. In this respect, the Overnight—a community building activity—seems to play a major role in helping newcomers getting used to being in the ADP community by getting to know people. As presented above, Kathy "felt lost" because there was no Overnight in her sophomore year. This suggests that the program may benefit from promoting

more community-building activities outside of the school context so that students and teachers can get to know one another "on a different level" in Kathy's word.

This is a sharp contrast with what happened in their sophomore year in which all seven students were not very motivated and had low self-esteem and confidence in themselves, and were neither socially recognized nor performing well academically. Although it is difficult—if not impossible—in a qualitative study to partial out the effects of the democratic program on such changes in students from other factors, such as students' natural maturation over time, the trust relationships that they develop over time seem to be key in their social and academic development.

However, I should be aware of the limitations of this study that arise from the fact that I focused only on those students who changed dramatically over time to become active participants. Especially, this study leaves out the voices of those who are not active participants of the community. In fact, they may have problems with and concerns about the program. Thus, there is one important implication that comes from the finding that students' mere enrollment in ADP does not automatically allow them to become a legitimate member of the community. That is, it implies that there may be "isolated students" in **Figure 2** who continue to have a sense of isolation because they do not participate actively in various activities for some reasons.

In fact, there were a few occasions in which I heard people talk about issues of what to do with those who are always quiet and do not participate. In my observation, for example, I noticed that there was one Asian student who never spoke in class except for when the teacher called on her to read her short story. But, when she did, I thought that the story was excellent. Such a realization leads Angela to comment in a Review Committee meeting:

> It is hard to know why people don't talk in class. Some people do their homework, but don't talk. They are mentally there, but it is more of their character. Other students don't do their homework and don't talk. But, it seems to be hard for the Review Committee to deal with the issue.

As a Japanese person, I grew up with one proverb saying, "Speech is silver, silence is golden," that suggests that it is better to be quiet than to be talkative especially for boys in the Japanese culture. Therefore, although it was beyond the scope of this study, it may be interesting to conduct a future study focusing on experiences of Asian students or any students who are not active in the community while examining how they perceive themselves in the participatory nature of the program. One interesting question to ask is, "Can you become a respected member of the community without actively participating in school activities?"

Although this is beyond the scope of this study, one important contribution that democratic schools make seem to be the development of a sense of social efficacy in students and teachers—a feeling that they can contribute to and make a difference in their society. When the majority of people regain the sense of social efficacy, people's political and social participation is likely to increase. More research studies are needed to examine the relationship between democratic schooling and social efficacy, but the study that I presented above contributes to the increased understanding of students' changes over time while they are enrolled in school. What Wood (1992) powerfully stated seem to be appropriate closing words for this paper.

> We often tend to limit what schools can do to nurture a democratic disposition because of the limited way we think about what people learn at school. We look at the textbooks, the curriculum guides, and lists of goals and objectives and assume that the transmission of this material is the meat of the school experience. But this attitude hides more than it tells us. What students learn in school is not what shows up on the standardized tests. More important is what they learn from the daily treatment they receive in school; this is what tells them who they are, what they can be, how their world is ordered (Wood, 1992, p.82).

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